

Hey, Southridge Community Church. Keri Ladouceur, a longtime friend of your pastor, Jeff Lockyer, and my friend Ellen Duffield is a part of your church. Jeff and I have gotten to serve together for years and a couple of different ministry endeavors. I've gotten to join him on his podcast Finding Your Way, and I continue to be inspired by you all as the beloved community seeking to find your way together. I get to serve as the executive director of an organization called The Post Evangelical Collective, really helping to connect and resource churches that are also trying to find their way to be a part of what the spirit is doing to cultivate the values of God's kingdom. I love getting to do that work, and I'm a pastor in the Chicago Land area a teaching pastor and pastor of innovation. I wanted to tell you recently, a guy at my church actually came running up to me after church and he said to come to our leadership meeting that week on Zoom.

He had told his colleagues, Hey guys, I gotta run. I have a meeting with Pastor Ludicrous <laugh> he didn't know how to say my last name, Ladouceur. And so ever since then, I have been known as Pastor Ludicrous at my church. And if you don't know who ludicrous is, ludicrous is a pretty famous rapper. You should know that I wrapped my speech in the fifth grade to become student body president. And so I have felt really seen by that name that beloved nickname that I've gotten from my church. I am not going to rap for you today, but I do love words and I love studying God's word diving into letters in the Bible to us as followers of Jesus. I love diving into them for meaning. And I'm thrilled that you all have been diving into this letter that the Apostle Paul sent to the Philippians.

I know last week, Jeff started in chapter three, the first couple of verses talking about how Paul is addressing to this community. What are the, the markers of those who truly belong? He sort of calls out the judaizers saying, the ones who are trying to define who is in and who is out, they're actually the ones who are out because everyone belongs. And he didn't want to see those teachers of the law adding unnecessary burden to the Jewish laws, to the expectations of what it looked like to follow Jesus. And we're gonna pick up in chapter three, just a couple of verses later where Jeff left off chapter three, verse four. It said, for it is we, who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his spirit, who

Boast in Christ Jesus and who put no confidence in the flesh? Paul says, though I myself have reasons for this competence, Paul is starting right here with this challenge to us about where we get our identity, where our credibility as followers of the way comes from. He's saying, are we simply to be good? Law keepers remember, just wrapped up, he had just wrapped up articulating that those who are adding to the law are making the gospel about something it wasn't intended to be about. He's trying to establish that where our identity as followers of the way comes from where our credibility comes from is that we are in Christ. He says, those who boast in Christ Jesus, but have no confidence in the flesh. I think sometimes we can get tripped up by this word flesh in the text particularly in the church, the faith tradition I grew up in sort of represented the flesh as if it were bad.

But I think it's important to remember Jesus himself took on flesh. Part of what it means to be a human is to wear flesh. We embody our humanity within bodies and we embody our beliefs in and through our humanity with skin and bones. I just wanna be cautious that we don't demonize our bodies or demonize the flesh because how we view our very humanity matters in this conversation and what Paul's talking about when he's talking about flesh, he's talking about our, our pride or our status being earned by the flesh. Last week he's talking about, you know, circumcision being a sign or a signal, an external sign of whether or not we had status, as if it were a way that we could prove during that time that were good keepers of the law, good sort of box checkers by some physical or educational or some status that could be kept, some symbol of status.

Paul is, goes immediately into all of the ways that he could have been defined by his status, the physical, the familial status, his educational status. He's saying it's not about circumcision. It's not about a physical marker to prove who is in or who is out. It's not about who can keep the law more effective.

He's saying that if it were about that, that he's got us all beat. Anyways, I, I mean, check this out. He's saying if someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more. He's saying, I was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, not just the people of Israel, but of the tribe of Benjamin. He's a Hebrew of Hebrews in regard to the law, he's a pharisee. As for zeal, persecuting the church as for righteousness based on the law, faultless Paul is saying, I have checked all the boxes, I have crossed all the Ts, I have dotted all the eyes.

I'm a pharisee, I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews. I have so much zeal. I was persecuting people who were following Jesus. I have so much righteousness in keeping the law, I would be found faultless. He's taking, saying if we could take pride in our lineage, this was an important thing in his time and sort of the family of dissent he wanted his early readers to know if anyone should be able to boast about anything they bring to the table. It was him. He's talking about status here. He's saying if, if there's anything that could be earned or be proved by law, keeping by our family line, by doing all of the right things, by keeping the law, if there was any way to make oneself worthy or even superior to others, Paul is saying he had accomplished it. He in his own physical self had already accomplished it.

And I think there's temptation for all of us to achieve some sort of status, or in fact, the ways that we are cultured or or socialized, there are ways that we may try to earn or prove our worthiness. I wanna stop for just a minute here and invite us to explore what are those things for us today? What are the ways that we may seek to define ourselves or earn or prove worthiness? This was a status way of thinking for Paul. He was trying to attempt to remove anything that could be earned or proven. And maybe for you it's things like church attendance, all of the things. Do you show up on Sunday? Do you show up on to small group during the week? Are you keeping a list? Are you serving in the ministry? Are you out serving other folks? Are there ways within the church that you want to earn or prove status or worthiness?

Where I live, the culture can be pretty success oriented. A lot of people are into brand names and high degrees from elite educational organizations that job titles or income bracket brackets can be touted. Unfortunately, this can happen inside of and outside of the church. And Paul is saying, here, let's look at the things that we turn to for status, because there's really only one thing in this life that is important. He goes on in verse seven to say, but whatever word gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more? I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. What is Paul elevating in place of status or any sort of earned worthiness here?

Knowing Christ, Paul is saying, to know and be known by Christ, to be found in Christ and to be filled, fulfilled by Christ is the A number one most important thing. He's saying his status is found in being right with God in alignment with the ways of God's kingdom. In verse eight, he says, I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. This righteousness, this justification Paul is saying, is not found in anything that he could do, in anything that he could earn, in anything that he could prove or anything that he could produce. He has the highest ranking status. He likely went to temple and heard the teaching in Hebrew, not Greek like those other less holy Jews.

He's saying there is no spiritual prosperity gospel here. There is no formula, no rule book you can follow no rituals, you can keep no lists or boxes to check that will earn you status. He's saying there is nothing that is worth it except to know Christ. This idea of a spiritual prosperity gospel, I, I wonder if you have experienced this. The faith tradition that I grew up in handed me some ideas that sort of suggested if I just lived right, if I followed a certain set of rules, it was sort of like, don't drink, don't cuss, don't have sex before marriage, and then eventually you're gonna be ushered off into this place of heaven and, and

saved from hell and burning fires. It was this prosperity gospel that sort of suggested if I did enough behavior modification, I would be rescued and sent off to heaven as this place burned.

It was a prosperity gospel that sort of suggested A plus B equals C. What I found is that A plus B doesn't always equal C. I think the unintended consequence of the spiritual prosperity gospel is that it led me to believe if I just acted right and did right, that things would go right for me. And then when things hit hard places, when I ran into difficulty in my life, I was sort of less thinking like, well, what have I done to earn this? If I did this and this, it was supposed to equal this, and now all of a sudden I've fallen on hard times. Have I done something to earn a difficult time? Did I fail in keeping the right behavior in keeping the right checklist? And what I have discovered, friends is that there is no spiritual prosperity gospel where enough behavior modification leads to a good and hopeful life.

What God is after is not behavior modification, but is after our heart transformation. There is nothing to earn or to prove. In fact, what Paul is telling us here is that he counts it all as trash. Everything that he could do to earn or to prove right status, he counts it as trash. This version says garbage. Some versions of the text say Dog dung <laugh>. What Paul is saying is that anything else we could derive our status from, anything that we could do to try to earn or prove our way into rightness with God, any of that is crap compared to knowing Christ.

He goes on in verse 10 to say, I want to know Christ yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his suffering becoming like him in his death. And so somehow attaining to the resurrection of the dead and know Christ and to participate in his resurrection power in resurrection life here and now. Not something that's gonna happen later after our death, but resurrection life here and now, Paul is saying means becoming intimately familiar with suffering. To know the power of Christ's resurrection means to participate in his suffering. Paul's getting at status and what can be earned or prove where our status comes from. And he's telling us that our status is found in knowing and being known by Christ in the way that we do. That is through suffering. I have a friend who talks about suffering as the discomfort of waking up.

I know there are some of us who have been marginalized and suffering isn't something that we have had to be woken up to something as something that has been woven into our experience of our existence in this world. Maybe because of your gender or ethnicity, your gender identity or a religious tradition, you may not have had the luxury of waking up to suffering because perhaps you've been awake to the realities of suffering for most of your life. Maybe you've stepped into experiences that have cost you and led to suffering. Several years ago, I worked at one of the more predominant churches in North America. I, I worked for a high profile leader who had shaped the imaginations of what church was, was what the predominant model of church was and North America and around the world. And in my time working for this leader, I also experienced inappropriate behavior.

I never said yes to the inappropriate invitations. I kind of brushed off the comments for a while. I rationalized them until I learned that there were other stories of women who had experienced demeaning and demoralizing comments, who some who didn't say no to the invitations and actually experienced harm and abuse from the spiritual leader. And as I wrestled through what was happening and what those experiences were through the care of counselors, I, I learned that this was abusive behavior. This was clergy sexual misconduct. This was injustice and power being stewarded inappropriately. And I decided if I didn't speak up about these injustices and I just walked away from the situation which I could have done and just left it in the rear view mirror behind me, I discerned through a community that I felt like I would've been complicit and the harm of others had that behavior continued.

And so I spoke up about this injustice. I had no idea what I was stepping into. I had no idea the cost that would come with speaking up. I had no idea the organizational betrayal. I would experience not being

believed. I had no idea of the relational or vocational loss that would come with speaking up about injustice. This was a situation I had no idea what I was stepping into. That cracked me open and led to significant suffering for years after speaking up. I share this because what I discovered through that experience was not a spiritual prosperity gospel. That if you do the right things, it will lead to the right conditions or to comfort. I actually found significant discomfort and suffering through doing the right thing. I discovered through that though that suffering is fertile ground for transformation. Suffering was a place that I met Christ in ways that I never had before.

And maybe suffering for you has been through a medical diagnosis or the loss of a loved one. Maybe it was a trauma that was inflicted on you when you least expected it that has taken so much from you. Maybe suffering for you is another failed pregnancy test or a job loss or income loss. Maybe it's injustice that you experienced in a relationship that led to significant personal harm for you. Many of us are intimately familiar with suffering, and what I want you to know is that in your suffering, Jesus is near whether you're suffering silently or whether those you're sitting with right now are aware and familiar with your suffering, Jesus sees and knows your suffering. And it says in the Psalms that he is most near to the brokenhearted. We experience Christ's nearness in our suffering.

There's a call for us as well who are unfamiliar with what it is to suffer. Paul is saying, look around you. Wake up. Embrace the discomfort of suffering. Embrace the discomfort of waking up and where it is appropriate. Suffer with others, suffer with others for the sake of change. Suffer with others because of what you believe. Suffer with others because of the flourishing that you want to advocate for, for your neighbor or your friends or your family members who are stuck within systems that do them harm. I don't know what you believe about God's sovereignty. Whether God causes bad things to happen or allows bad things to happen and friends, I wrestle with this, but what I do know is that God can use anything for our good and for his purposes. And if you're someone who's listening right now, who is unfamiliar with what suffering is like, I encourage you to lean into the suffering of those around you to lean into advocating for those who experience harm.

It is in our suffering that we can most relate to the character and nature of Christ. Simon Wheel says The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural use for suffering. Paul is saying that anything related to his status that he could earn or prove means nothing compared to knowing Christ. And he's saying that if we want to experience the resurrection power of Christ in our lives, that means that we must become intimately familiar with suffering as Christ was. He goes on to tell us in verse 12, not that I have already obtained all of this or that I have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heaven Word in Christ Jesus.

What is the goal? Paul is clear. It's not status. It's not a checklist of right living or behavior modification, but it is a sincere way of living, of full heart transformation, of the kind of transformation that happens to us in suffering. He's saying it's sincere living. It's not comfort. He's saying, we become like Christ in our suffering. It's in our opening up to our own pain or to the pain of the world around us. It's in embracing our vulnerability and at times even our culpability to contribute to the suffering of others. Paul saying that the goal here is sincere living. It's the humility of Christ and the urgency of God's kingdom. What is the goal? It's like the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus says that he came to establish God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus came to embody the ways of God's kingdom, the the values of God's kingdom.

Jesus came to show us what it looks like to live as if we are ambassadors of God's kingdom, to live as if we are citizens of heaven, to be people who seek mutuality, people who advocate for the marginalized,

not seeking justice for justice's sake, not for vengeance, but because God's original intention for creation was flourishing and flourishing for all of us. Flourishing for creation itself. God's desire was for goodness for us. It was for flourishing for us, flourishing in our relationships, flourishing in how we relate to ourselves, flourishing in how we relate to God, theirselves flourishing to how we relate to others and to the world around us. Jesus says that he came so that we could have life and life to the full. It is our sincere living, our living according to the value system of heaven that Jesus wants for us. That is what it looks like for us to be this community, this church that Paul was writing to, to be a people, a, a community of people who would disrupt the status quo when the status quo is leading to the harm of our brothers or sisters.

To be a people that dismantle systems of oppression that reject old paradigms that the world would offer us that interrupt bad jokes at work or comments made in poor taste about other people in the office space. That that we would be a people who outdo one another in hospitality. When is the last time someone you had around your dinner table caused a ding in your status? When is the time that you had people who were not like you breaking bread together, that you were sharing and being generous, not just with your financial resources but with your entire life? The invitation from Paul here is that we would reject status, that we would relate to Christ through our suffering when we suffer as Christ did, and that we would have humility in what it looks like to pursue, right living, that we would be a people who embody the values of God's kingdom.

That we would live lives as Jesus lived as people who are establishing, we're ushering in God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. That we would be people who are healing and growing and sharing and knowing our full selves and taking the time to truly see and call one another forward, celebrating one another, not in our status, but in our suffering and in our sincere right living, that we'd be divesting from systems that value profit over people. That we would be people who are advocating for the goodness and the wholeness of our neighbors in our education systems, in our community systems within our organizations that that we would be a people who are reimagining, a world that is generative and abundant where reciprocity and mutuality between men and women and different generations and different ethnicities where mutuality and belonging would rule family. May we be a people that accept this invitation from Paul to the Philippian church, that that accept this invitation to those of us who wanna sincerely follow Jesus today.

May we acknowledge that there is no status that we could earn or prove there is nothing we could accumulate or accomplish that would ever make us any more loved or any less loved than the love we find in Christ. May we be a people who move towards suffering, who even count the cost of suffering as a part of what it means to live faithfully into the ways of Jesus. Advocating for the marginalized, pushing back injustice, reimagining what it looks like to embody the values of God's kingdom and community. And may we be a people who pursue sincere living, who humbly push towards the goal, push for the prize as people who are pouring it out, inviting people in who are activating and embodying the ways of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, such that people would interact with us and they would have a taste of the goodness of God in the ways that we embody Christ in the watching world.

Would you pray with me? Jesus, we are so grateful that there is nothing to earn, that there is nothing to prove that your love and what you have accomplished for us is enough. And God, we long for your resurrection power in our lives and we acknowledge that the way to that power is through suffering. I pray that any of us who are experiencing suffering right now would be comforted by your presence, God, that we would be bound up in hope for what you can and will accomplish through our suffering, God, that our lives would be living sacrifices for you and that we would embody the ways of your kingdom. God, I pray that people would be drawn to you because of the goodness they experience in and through this beloved community. Father, we love you and we thank you. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

